

Message Text

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SUBJECT: POLADS SPECIAL PROJECTS - SOVIET AND CUBAN
MILITARY PENETRATION IN AFRICA

REF: (A) STATE 44016; (B) USNATO 1563

AS PART OF US CONTRIBUTION TO POLADS EXCHANGE, MISSION MAY
CIRCULATE FOLLOWING PAPER ON THE DOMESTIC IMPACT OF CUBA'S
INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICA:

BEGIN TEXT:

MARCH 3, 1978

CUBA: DOMESTIC IMPACT OF AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT
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1. THE POLITICAL, MILITARY, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL COSTS
TO CUBA OF ITS EXPANDING ROLE IN AFRICA ARE STILL WELL
WITHIN MANAGEABLE LIMITS AND ARE NOT A SIGNIFICANT CON-
STRAINT ON CUBAN POLICYMAKERS. ONLY HEAVY CUBAN
CASUALTIES WOULD BE LIKELY TO PRESENT THE CASTRO
REGIME WITH DIFFICULT POLITICAL PROBLEMS.

2. REACTION TO THE COUNTRY'S EXTENSIVE INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICA IS MIXED AMONG THE CUBAN PEOPLE. PRO-REGIME ACTIVISTS OPENLY SUPPORT THE AFRICAN COMMITMENTS, BUT MANY PEOPLE ARE CONVINCED THAT THE COUNTRY'S CURRENT AUSTERITY IS CAUSED BY THE INVOLVEMENT; IN FACT, IT STEMS LARGELY FROM LOW WORLD SUGAR PRICES. NO ORGANIZED OPPOSITION EXISTS IN CUBA, HOWEVER, AND WITHOUT PLANNING, COORDINATION, AND LEADERSHIP, THOSE WHO OPPOSE CUBA'S ROLE IN AFRICA HAVE LITTLE IMPACT ON REGIME LEADERS. SO FAR, OPPOSITION IS LIMITED TO GRUMBLING AMONG FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF ORDINARY CUBANS SENT TO DO SERVICE IN AFRICA.

3. AS IS HIS CUSTOM DURING PERIODS OF FLAGGING POPULAR SUPPORT, PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO HAS SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF TIME SINCE MID-1977 TRAVELING THROUGH THE COUNTRY TRYING TO BOLSTER MORALE. CASTRO IS KEENLY AWARE OF -- AND EXPLOITS -- THE CONSIDERABLE CAPACITY OF THE CUBAN PEOPLE TO ENDURE HARDSHIPS. HIS NORMAL REACTION IS TO MANUFACTURE BOTH A REASON TO SUFFER AND A SCAPEGOAT TO HATE. A MASTER OF MEDIA MANIPULATION, HE HAS LITTLE TROUBLE REFOCUSING PUBLIC ANGER AND GENERATING RENEWED REVOLUTIONARY MOMENTUM.

4. CASTRO IS PROBABLY NOT YET OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT
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PUBLIC ATTITUDES. THE NUMEROUS SPEECHES AND HEAVY MEDIA TREATMENT IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS ARE, IN EFFECT, PREEMPTIVE MOVES TO HEAD OFF DISAFFECTION. CASTRO DOUBTLESS KNOWS THAT THE CURRENT LEVEL OF DISCONTENT IS WELL WITHIN TOLERABLE LIMITS AND THAT BY CAREFUL PERSUASION HE CAN KEEP IT FAR SHORT OF THE POINT WHERE OUTRIGHT REPRESSION MIGHT BE REQUIRED.

5. MILITARY COSTS: CUBA NOW HAS 30,000 TO 33,000 MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFRICA, INCLUDING 19,000 TO 20,000 IN ANGOLA AND AN ESTIMATED 10,000 TO 11,000 IN ETHIOPIA. MOST WERE MOBILIZED FROM CUBA'S READY RESERVES, IN PART TO SPREAD THE EFFECTS THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND AND IN PART TO AVOID WEAKENING CUBA'S DEFENSES BY DRAWING FROM ACTIVE-DUTY PERSONNEL. THE USSR HAS SUPPLIED ABOUT 30 SOVIET FIGHTER PILOTS TO TAKE THE PLACE OF CUBAN PILOTS FLYING COMBAT MISSIONS IN ETHIOPIA.

6. PROVIDED THE USSR CONTINUES TO UNDERWRITE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE CUBAN EFFORT, HAVANA PROBABLY COULD INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY ITS COMMITMENT IN AFRICA WITHOUT SERIOUSLY DAMAGING ITS ECONOMY OR DEFENSE CAPABILITIES.

7. FOR EXAMPLE, A 50 PERCENT INCREASE IN CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFRICA -- TO ABOUT 50,000 -- WOULD IMPINGE ON CUBA'S MILITARY CAPABILITIES, BUT THE IMPACT WOULD PROBABLY BE MANAGEABLE. CUBA'S ARMED FORCES TOTAL ABOUT 180,000 PERSONNEL, INCLUDING SOME 60,000 READY RESERVISTS WHO CAN BE MOBILIZED WITHIN 24 HOURS.

8. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE ANOTHER 210,000 RESERVISTS WHO HAVE UNDERGONE BASIC TRAINING AND WHO COULD BE ON ACTIVE DUTY WITHIN 20 DAYS. CUBA'S POPULATION IS RELATIVELY YOUNG -- 53 PERCENT OF ITS 9.65 MILLION PEOPLE ARE UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, WITH SOME 550,000 MALES BETWEEN 18 AND 24.

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9. ECONOMIC COSTS: THE LOSS OF SKILLED AND UNSKILLED WORKERS HAS CAUSED DISRUPTION IN SEVERAL SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY, BUT THE COSTS TO THE ECONOMY IN GENERAL HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY SMALL. THE LOSS OF UNSKILLED WORKERS HAS BEEN MINIMIZED BY INCREASED MECHANIZATION OF THE LABOR-INTENSIVE SUGARCANE HARVEST AND THE WIDESPREAD USE OF STUDENT LABOR IN AGRICULTURE.

10. LOGISTIC COSTS HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO A RELATIVELY SMALL PORTION OF THE CUBAN MERCHANT FLEET AT ANY ONE TIME AND A SMALL NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT. THIS COST OF DIVERSION HAS AMOUNTED TO ONLY ABOUT \$15 MILLION ANNUALLY AT MOST AND HAS NOT SERIOUSLY DISRUPTED CUBAN TRADE PATTERNS OR COMMERCIAL AIRLINE SCHEDULES.

11. CUBA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE APPARENTLY SLOWED IN 1976, BUT THE SLOWDOWN WAS PRIMARILY THE RESULT OF A SMALL DECREASE IN THAT YEAR'S SUGAR HARVEST AND A DECLINE IN INVESTMENT. NONSUGAR AGRICULTURE REGISTERED SMALL GAINS, AS DID INDUSTRY, ALTHOUGH OUTPUT WAS IMPAIRED BY A REDUCTION IN RAW MATERIAL IMPORTS FROM THE WEST. IN NEITHER CASE DID A SHORTAGE OF LABOR SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT OUTPUT. ALTHOUGH PRODUCTION DATA FOR 1977 ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT WAS ANY MORE AFFECTED IN 1977 BY HAVANA'S INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICA THAN IT WAS IN 1976.

12. WHILE CUBA SUPPLIES MUCH OF THE SUBSISTENCE AND SALARY COSTS FOR ITS MILITARY FORCES IN AFRICA, THE COST OF VIRTUALLY ALL THE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES USED BY THE CUBANS, AS WELL AS BY THE AFRICANS BEING SUPPORTED, IS BORNE BY THE USSR. THE USSR HAS ALSO PROVIDED PLANES TO

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FACILITATE CUBAN LOGISTICS BETWEEN HAVANA AND LUANDA.

IN ADDITION, SOVIET PASSENGER SHIPS HAVE BEEN UTILIZED TO TRANSPORT MANY OF THE CUBAN COMBAT PERSONNEL NOW IN ETHIOPIA.

13. THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT ALSO APPARENTLY IS SHARING THE COST OF THE CUBAN PRESENCE IN THAT COUNTRY. THE ANGOLANS PROBABLY PAY FOR THE FOOD AND LODGING OF CUBAN CIVILIAN ADVISERS, AND PERHAPS PART OF THE SUBSISTENCE COSTS FOR CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL.

14. THE DIRECT COST OF MAINTAINING CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFRICA IS ESTIMATED AT ABOUT \$55 MILLION TO \$60 MILLION ANNUALLY. THE TOTAL ESTIMATED \$70 MILLION TO \$75 MILLION ANNUAL BILL, INCLUDING THE COST OF DIVERTING CUBAN SHIPS AND PLANES TO THE EFFORT, REPRESENTS ONLY ABOUT 0.9 PERCENT OF ESTIMATED 1976 GNP. THE SHARE OF CUBA'S LABOR FORCE REPRESENTED BY ITS MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFRICA EQUALS ABOUT 1.1 PERCENT.

15. OUTLOOK: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COSTS OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICA WILL PROBABLY REMAIN MANAGEABLE FOR HAVANA, AT LEAST FOR THE NEAR TERM. A DEEPENING POPULAR DISAFFECTION, STEMMING FROM AN EXAGGERATED PERCEPTION OF THE FINANCIAL COSTS, COULD POSE A CONSTRAINT ON CUBAN POLICYMAKERS, HOWEVER, SHOULD THE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES THE CUBANS SUFFER INCREASE RAPIDLY.

16. REPORTING ON THE NUMBER KILLED OR WOUNDED IN ANGOLA AND ETHIOPIA IS SPOTTY AT BEST AND THE REGIME DOES NOT ANNOUNCE CASUALTY FIGURES; ESTIMATES OF CUBANS KILLED IN ANGOLA SINCE LATE 1975 RANGE BETWEEN 600 AND 2,000. IF THERE WERE A SURGE OF CASUALTIES, THE REGIME WOULD PROBABLY BE UNABLE TO MANAGE THE DOMESTIC IMPACT SUFFICIENTLY TO PREVENT OPEN DISAFFECTION.

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17. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, THE CUBAN POPULACE MIGHT RESORT TO PASSIVE PROTESTS. SUCH MEASURES WOULD NOT BE UNPRECEDENTED IN RECENT CUBAN HISTORY. WORKER SLOWDOWNS AND WIDESPREAD ABSENTEEISM OCCURRED IN THE EARLY 1970S WHEN SUPPLIES OF CONSUMER GOODS FAILED TO IMPROVE AFTER THE RECORD 1970 HARVEST. THESE PROTESTS, TOGETHER WITH

STRONG PRESSURES FROM THE USSR, CAUSED THE GOVERNMENT TO INSTITUTE MAJOR ECONOMIC POLICY CHANGES -- SOME OF WHICH WENT AGAINST ITS BASIC IDEOLOGICAL TENETS -- IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE ECONOMIC PRODUCTION.

18. THE CUBAN PEOPLE'S DEMONSTRATED CAPACITY FOR ENDURANCE AND SACRIFICE MAY BE FURTHER ENHANCED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPAGANDA MACHINERY. IN THE END, HOWEVER, THE EXTENT AND DURATION OF CUBA'S INVOLVEMENT WILL DEPEND MAINLY ON THE DEGREE OF ITS LEADERS' DEDICATION TO THE AFRICAN POLICY. ALL INDICATIONS SO FAR ARE THAT THEY ARE PREPARED TO PAY A HEAVY PRICE.

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